Can You Believe It? Silver Already! December 17

Today is the 25th anniversary of the public opening of the National Cryptologic Museum. I am the only one of the original designers of the museum still on active duty at NSA, and would like to share some of my memories of that time. The museum was a team effort, so I'd like to talk about the team and some of the circumstances of opening a most unusual facility by a component of the Intelligence Community.

The Center for Cryptologic History (CCH), established in late 1989, inherited an artifact collection and a curator for the artifacts, Earl J. Coates, whom everybody called "Jerry." Jerry, who resembled Robert E. Lee, specialized in Civil War and other pre-modern history. For years, Jerry had arranged small groups of artifacts in display cases around NSA's Fort Meade campus. He also had drawn up contingency plans for larger displays, just in case he was ever given an entire room as a display area. (This idea had surfaced every once in a while but was never implemented; space has always been tight at NSA.)

Henry F. Schorreck, whom everybody called "Hank," and who resembled Ulysses Grant, had been the NSA historian for more than a decade, and was a real pioneer in the field of cryptologic history. He had rescued key documents from destruction, and had put together one of the first coherent studies of how American cryptology had developed from early times up through the establishment of NSA. Hank, too, had definite ideas of what artifacts should be displayed, if NSA ever set aside an entire room for it, and how such a display area could be used to teach NSA employees about their heritage.

David W. Gaddy, whom everybody called "Dave," was chief of the newly formed CCH. Dave was a long-time NSA senior manager, with wide experience inside the Agency and also in outside liaising, and had a strong personal interest in history. He had long advocated a greater emphasis on writing NSA's history, and the use of these histories as textbooks in classes at the National Cryptologic School.

In 1990, NSA unexpectedly came into possession of the Colony 7 Motel. This had been on a small sliver of land in private hands that lay between Fort Meade and the Baltimore-Washington Parkway. The facility, an office building and a number of bedroom buildings, had come up for sale. The problem was, once NSA had it, NSA didn't know what to do with it. The Agency's Space Committee considered a number of proposals for the buildings, but none seemed to be acceptable. The CCH then pushed a proposal to create a museum for the professional education of the NSA workforce. Gaddy, with his deep knowledge of the workings of the bureaucracy, was very effective in pushing this effort.

At this point, the unexpected happened again. The DIRNSA, Vice Admiral William O. Studeman, had been prodding the Agency into greater interaction with the public sector. He believed that NSA, as the Cold War ended, could no longer survive as an institution if it continued to keep a low profile and be defined in public only by its critics. Admiral Studeman supported programs, for example, for NSA's mathematicians to promote in various ways the study of advanced math in public schools. He gave a number of public speeches, unprecedented for an NSA director, and, in addressing the Baltimore-Washington (B-W) Corridor Chamber of Commerce, he made a public promise to open a public museum.

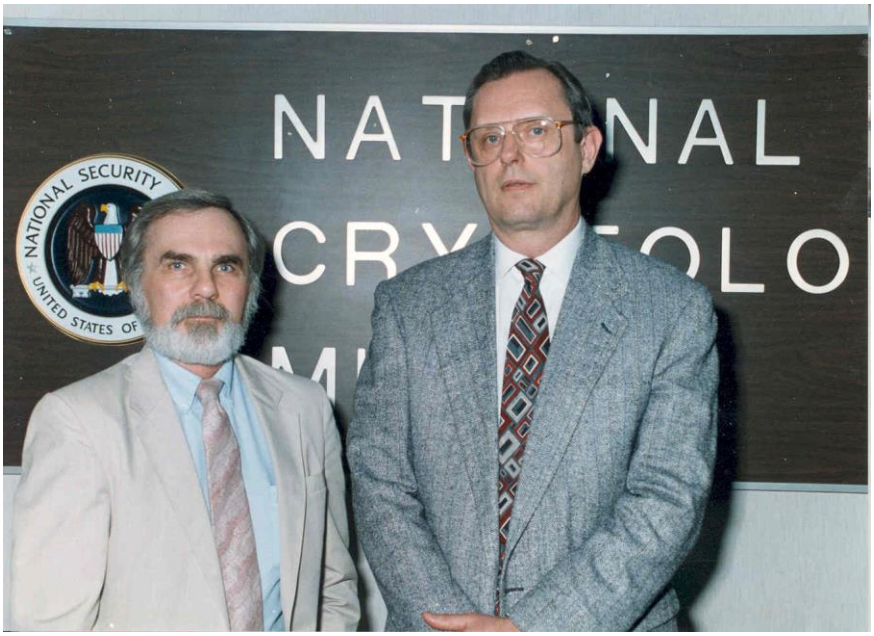
The only logical place for such a facility was the Colony 7 complex.

Many senior NSA managers opposed the idea of a public facility, but Admiral Studeman overrode their objections. However, the Space Committee allocated only half the main Colony 7 building to the new museum (what is now the World War II gallery), seeing the wisdom of using the rest of the space for unclassified conferences and classes. They reasoned it would be simpler to bring in uncleared visitors and teachers to the Colony 7 than elsewhere on campus "behind the fence."

The hallway from the lobby to the main gallery

When the CCH staff first visited the Colony 7 building, it was easy to see why the owner had put it on the market. Not only was the place really filthy, but most of the infrastructure was out-of-date, and it was apparent that it would take considerable effort and expense to bring the wiring and water pipes up to current standards.

With the existence of the museum now approved, Gaddy brought in an additional staffer who was crucial to making the museum a reality. Jack Ingram, whom everybody called "Jack," had been a long-time instructor at the National Cryptologic School, but he had also been a persistent researcher and lecturer on the history of communications security (today's cybersecurity). More to the point, he had a natural talent for design, and he was able to take Jerry Coates's concepts and come up with concrete plans for actual exhibits. Ingram was appointed assistant curator.



Jerry Coates and Jack Ingram at the lobby entrance sign

So, Jerry Coates created a scheme for using artifacts to tell U.S. cryptologic history and, with Jack Ingram, drafted workable plans for actualizing them. Hank Schorreck and I divvied up writing the captions for each exhibit and artifact. (I then was a CCH division chief, one step below Hank.) A contractor began the rehabilitation of the building. Two talented craftsmen from NSA's carpentry shop brought their tools over to the Colony 7 and made it their primary workplace for several months, as they brought the Coates/Ingram designs into actuality.

It should be noted that our instructions said that we could not exhibit anything that dealt with events past September 1945 (the end of World War II). Even many aspects of World War II were then still classified. The Agency made one exception to this rule: we were allowed an exhibit about the attack on the collection ship USS *Liberty* in 1967. Dave Gaddy had, through contacts, acquired one of the flags that had been raised above the ship the day it was attacked.* Coates's design placed the *Liberty* flag so that it was the first thing visitors saw when entering the museum's front door.** Over time, as the museum became successful and as more declassification occurred, the topics that could be covered expanded.

The museum's space expanded, as well. When Lieutenant General Kenneth A. Minihan, USAF, became DIRNSA in 1996 he told his staff that NSA ought to have a museum. Informed that NSA already had one, he decided to inspect it to determine if it met his standards. He came to the building, accompanied by James Devine, chief of the key component responsible for the museum, on a very hot day, by no coincidence one of the frequent days we were having problems with the HVAC system. He almost at once demanded why in hell it was so hot and ordered Devine to fix the problem ASAP. After his tour, General Minihan turned to Jack Ingram and me and asked if we "owned" the building. We replied that we had only half of it. In short order, we had both a larger and a cooler museum.***

At that time there was a wire fence around the museum; every day the first duty for the staff was to unlock the pedestrian gate to admit visitors. General Minihan thought it made the place look like a POW camp and ordered the fence taken down.

But all that was still in the future. We opened the museum to the NSA workforce in July 1993. We correctly figured it would take time to develop tours and patter at each exhibit, and that we could only get good at this through experience. There were a few outside visitors over the next few months, usually liaison personnel

from other government agencies who heard about the place through conversations with their NSA contacts. The outside scholar David Kahn, author of *The Codebreakers*, somehow heard about the museum and asked for a tour; he was not then the friend of NSA that he became later in the decade. Our management, however, decided it would be best to give him a low-key private tour than have him kick up a fuss and generate bad publicity.

All of us involved in establishing the museum understood we were doing something unprecedented—not only for NSA but within the Intelligence Community as well—and this added to our natural enthusiasm for the process. For me, the uniqueness of the effort was summed up as the museum opened to the public on this day in 1993; the president of the B-W Corridor Chamber of Commerce (where the idea for the museum had first surfaced) told the crowd that the first thing he had done that morning was to consult his doctor—"I had always been told that when NSA opened to the public, I'd be dead and gone."

* The story as told to me: the flag had been flying above the *Liberty* when Israeli warplanes attacked; it was taken down, hurriedly stuffed in a locker, and a larger American flag raised. When the *Liberty* eventually was taken to Malta to be scrapped, a contractor rescued the flag and kept it. When he somehow heard about the museum, he gave the flag to Dave Gaddy. Initial reports called it "the blood-stained flag" of the *Liberty*; it was "blood-stained" only metaphorically. The stains on the flag are oil, apparently picked up while stored in the locker. See it for yourself—the flag is still on display in the National Cryptologic Museum lobby.

** We were told at the time that this was the only memorial to the *Liberty* incident in the federal government. I was unable to confirm this.

*** By that time, Dave Gaddy, Henry Schorreck, and Jerry Coates had retired, and I was chief of the History Center, with Jack Ingram as curator.

By the way, the museum is open every federal workday, 0900-1600; it is also open the first and third Saturdays of each month, 1000-1400.

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508 captions: photo 1: a dark picture of the main corridor of the National Cryptologic Museum, before any refurbishing was done; photo 2: Jerry Coates and Jack Ingram standing in front of the lobby sign at the entrance to the National Cryptologic Museum portion of the Colony 7 building; photo 3: the front side of the museum building surrounded by a chain link fence.